

A

REVIEW

OF THE

STATE

OF THE

ENGLISH NATION.

Saturday, August 10. 1706.

I Cannot quit the Discourse of Plays without a Word about sober Plays, a thing now mightily talk'd of; I know no Argument remains, but that by which any Pretence to defend the Stage can be rais'd.

Now, if I would allow such a thing, *which really I cannot*, it comes before me to examine, when was such a Play acted, and what Reception did it meet with—— Let such Gentlemen ask Mr. *Dennis*, if his *Liberty asserted*, did not want the fashionable Gust to please the Palate of the Town; and all its Regularity of Parts, all its real Beauties of Performance could not supply the Defect.

'Tis true, Men of Vertue sometimes go to Plays——But I would ask, do they go to gratifie that Vertue; or to please a

meaner Part of their Inclination, and which do they find most forward to prompt their Attendance!

I shall not trace our Plays here to expose the Indecencies of them, 'tis done to my Hand; Mr. *Collier* has pursued them thro' all their dark Ways, and detested them of all that's wicked and prophane.

But after all those powerful Reasons against them, what shall we say to the Gentlemen at *Oxford*, who entertain and encourage among them those Exciters of Crime to carry on the scandalous Trade among the Students, and crowd the young Ears of those, who are sent there to be initiated into a Love of Learning and Vertue, with the loose and lewd Excursions of our Mob Wit, and common Street Eloquence.

What

What can be said to express so notorious a Breach of Trust, both upon the honest Founders of our Colleges for the Induction of Youth, and the honest Families of *English* Gentry, who send their Children to the Universities to be fitted and form'd for the Service of God and their Country?

But sober Plays! sober Plays may be acted, *say these People*: Well, Gentlemen of *Oxford*, which are they? Was Sir *John Falstaff* a sober Play, which you went in form to encourage, and which you had acted for the Repair of a *Church*, by which you set that fatal Example, which the Reverend Dr. L——r pleaded in Defence of the *second Edition* of a License to the Stage here in *London*? Is not that Play as full of prophane, immoral, and some blasphemous Parts, as most now extant? Is not Religion banter'd in it, the *Church* ridicul'd, and your Maker dishonour'd?

Pray, Gentlemen, let some of your learned Society defend that Play; and tell us, how the chaste Ears of a Protestant Divine could bear to hear the Affronts to his Dignity and Profession, as acted upon your own Stage! Let them defend, if they can, your carrying the Students of the University to a Play, where they should see the sacred Office, *which they were then qualifying themselves to undertake*, bantered by Scoundrels, made the Sport of the Stage, and the Actors clapt and huzza'd by the Professors of it — Is this the Encouragement to Youth to enter into the sacred Employment, which they see shall always be the Jest and Ridicule of the World; and that they are to expect the Scoffs of the Stage, and the Contempt even of their Teachers?

Well, Gentlemen, the Players are gone down to *Oxford* — Having entred into the Service of the Sacred here, and having rais'd a Fund of 50*l.* for repairing a Chapel, what will the World say, but that now they are entirely list'd in the Roll, and engag'd in *Church* Work for good and all?

But take this Caution with you, Gentlemen, to regulate your selves by; that every Play they act before you, shall be shown to the World, the Spirit of the Review shall be with you, and there shall not be a bawdy

Jest spoken, nor a prophane Sentence repeated, but he will tell the World, who laught and who did not; Not a Doctor, not a Head of a House, not a Fellow of a College shall go to them, but they shall hear of it; and if you will be made publick, Gentlemen, and particular for scandalizing your Profession, and reproaching the Age, take it for your Pains — This Paper declares against your Practice, not your Persons; against the Crime, not the Colleges; is an Enemy to your Vice, not your University; and if you will sin in publick, you must be content to hear of it in publick.

Give me no occasion, Gentlemen, I shall be as proud of doing Justice to your Vertue, as in exposing your Folly; I shall be as forward in acknowledging your strict Government and regular Suppression of the Vices and Follies of the Youth under your Care, as in detecting the Omissions of Duty. I have never attempted to expose the personal Vices and notorious Crimes, committed in our Universities; I know, where a Multitude of Youth are plac'd, there will be Follies, and will be Rakes, and none of the Immoralities of your Pupils reflect upon the Universities themselves as such; but those which are wink'd at, conniv'd or encourag'd by the Government of the University; if your Vice-Chancellors, Heads of Houses, &c. correct the Crimes they meet with, they keep up the Reputation of Discipline — But if these commit the Crimes they ought to punish, that is the Act of the whole, and their Faults reflect upon the general Character.

I was always of Opinion, that our Reformation of Manners must begin among our Masters, or it will never be finish'd among our Mob; the Examples of Magistrates and Rulers are the Pole-Stars of the People; if my own Watch goes wrong, it deceives no body but my self; but if the Town Clock strikes false, it imposes upon the whole Parish — You, Gentlemen, therefore to whose Charge the Hopes of the Nation are committed, in the Flower of our Families, and the growing Supporters of Learning; if you mis-guide, if you lead to Vice, Immorality and Prophaneity; if you teach our young Clergy to frequent Plays,
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Interludes and Theatrical Entertainments, not to God only, but to Men, you will be call'd to answer for the Breach of Trust— You betray the Honour of your Profession, and the good Name of the University.

And that I may remind you of this, and at the same time do Justice to your Brethren, who have more faithfully executed the Duty of their Places in a Trust of the same Kind; I humbly recommend to you the Example of your Sister *Cambridge*—

How have the Players been receiv'd there, and how their Encroachments resisted—The Devil has been always forward to creep into the Habitations of the faithful, and to make good a certain Verse I presume you have heard of; That

*Where ever God erects a House of Prayer,
The Devil always builds a Chapel there.*

The Players, not at all improperly call'd the Devil's Brokers, have made sundry Attempts to introduce themselves at *Cambridge*; nor are they without a much better Pretence for it, than at *Oxford*; which Pretence would form such an Excuse for the *Cantabrigians*, as could not well be objected against, till other places suppress them also; I mean the vast Concourse of People to *Stourbridge Fair*.

Here the Players have several Times attempted to erect the Devil's Chapel, and set up under Pretence of superiour Licenses; which Insolence the late Reverend Vice-Chancellor rewarded by committing Dogget the Player to Jail as he deserv'd, and ordering the Booth built for their Theatre to be demolish'd, effectually rooting up the Plantation of Vice they had erected, and banishing them from the Place.

How much more to the Honour of that University was this, than to see the Vice-Chancellor of the University of *Oxford*, with the Heads of Houses in their Formalities, go in Procession, follow'd by the Students, Inhabitants, and Ladies to the Play-house? which to me seems like a Picture I once saw abroad of King *Solomon*, with all his Court and a Train of Foreign Wives, *Anglicæ*, *W'tores*; having turn'd his Back upon the

Temple, the House of God of his own Building, and going in Procession to offer Sacrifice to the Devil.

I forbear to turn the Improvement of this into Satyr, as it really deserves; because I take it to be a serious thing, and for a Lamentation to *England*. I know, 'tis a Grief to many worthy good Men, as well among the Clergy, as the other Members of the Church of *England*; who daily pray and wish to see it reformed. I beseech God to open the Eyes of the Persons concern'd, to see how these Practices lay the Ax to the Root of the Church; how Vice in Authority, Vice in the Bowels of the Church, is a Sword at the Heart, a Mine under the Foundation, a Traytor in the Bosom, and the End will infallibly be either the Subversion of true Religion, or in the Shame and Punishment of the Guilty.

ADVERTISEMENT.

Whereas Notice has been given in this Paper, of a Book preparing for the Press, being an Impartial History of the Transactions of the Excise-Office, &c.

And whereas several Gentlemen have been at the Printer's of this Paper to desire, that their several Greivances and Oppressions may be inserted in the said Account, which Mr. *Matthews* not being concern'd in the said Book, could give no direct Answer to.

These are to give Notice; that if any Gentlemen, who have been ill treated by the Commissioners of Excise, are desirous to have their Cases included, and will bring them so testified and vouch'd, that the Author may be satisfied, they are true in Fact and impartially related, they shall have Justice done them in the said Relation, provided they are brought in before the 18th. of this instant *August* to *Betty's Coffee-House* near the *Fell Mell* over against the *Hay-market*, directed to *Andrew Bowyer*, Esquire.

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